

Arvada
United Methodist Church

August 2, 2009

Soul Food

Rev. Rusty Butler

Exodus 16: 2-4, 9-15; Psalm 78: 23-29; John 6:35

Last Saturday, the youth group returned from the youth work trip to Salt Lake City, and we had the opportunity to go on a Whitewater rafting trip down the Colorado River just east of Glenwood Springs. How many of you have done some whitewater rafting? Sometimes that is fun. For people like me, who cannot swim, it is something else.

I think I've done this whitewater rafting thing about five times now with various youth groups over the last twenty years. I figure it is a good lesson for those young people to see their pastor facing down his fear. Or maybe just to let them see the fear on my face and think, oh he is more scared than me. That's a good lesson too.

We got to the River rafting company and got our life vests on and then sat down with another 50 or sixty people and this young woman, she might have been 20, gave us an orientation, told us about the commands the guides would use, talked about how to hold the paddle and what to grab if we needed to grab something, shared what we should do if we fell out of the boat. Good things to know.

So I listened attentively to what she was saying and so did everyone else...not a lot of fooling around going on there you know!

So we got in the buses and traveled up stream east of Glenwood Springs and got into the rafts and began making our way down the river.

We'd come to this point in the river and our guide whose name was Patrick and who was about 25 years old was leading us through it. I was sitting in the back of the boat, just ahead of Patrick. We got to one place and we went over a pretty big rock and then got kind of caught up in the back wash and we weren't getting through it. Kind of just rocking there in the water, it was like being on the back of a bucking bronco. Just kind of out of control. And I started grabbing for what the young woman told us was called the chicken line; it was a rope in the middle of the boat. While I was doing this, the youth at the front of the boat were having fun, screaming and hollering, and I was thinking to myself this is it, we are going over, goodbye cruel world! Well, the river finally kind of spit us out and when I gathered my wits, I

303 421 5135 6750 Carr Street 80004 arvadaumc.org

A church where science, religion and life are compatible

Arvada
United Methodist Church

looked back at Patrick, and he had this sheepish look and he said to me in a voice low enough that I don't think anyone else heard, "that rock is exactly what I was trying to miss!"

Now all the words that that young woman had said during the orientation, during the time that we were about to tip over...do you think I remembered what she said? Not a chance.

I've been thinking about orientation. About how we figure out what we are about and how we determine how we stand in relation to our surroundings, and about how we adjust ourselves in relation to the circumstances we find ourselves in. This week, my oldest son, David, had a meeting where all the first year teachers in Jefferson Country were invited for an orientation. Clara Klein will be going to college at Columbia, in the heart of New York City, in a few weeks, she told me that there they have two weeks of freshman orientation.

Orientation is vital; we need it to help us to figure out just who we are in the place and the circumstances that we find ourselves.

One way the Bible uses over and over again to help orient its readers is to tell the story, the history of the Hebrew people; the authors do it again and again.

In Psalm 78 you can hear the Psalmist recite what the people have gone through before...he is giving them a way to orient themselves.

He tells among other tales, the story from Exodus about how the people wanted food, and that manna came down from heaven to eat, and how the quail rained down like dust on the people.

The reason he recounts the story is that he is telling his audience, this is who we are, this is where we come from. It gives them their bearings.

How many of you have done some genealogical work? Some of you might have even gone to Salt Lake City to find some information in the library that the Mormons run out there. I think of the many people in our church who like to work on genealogical information. It's not only interesting to figure

Arvada
United Methodist Church

out who are ancestors were, it is a way of figuring out who we are and from where we have come. It is a way of orienting ourselves.

That is important. But Walter Brueggeman, the biblical scholar, says that as he reads the Bible and particularly the Psalms, he sees that there is a cycle, and the cycle is orientation, disorientation, and then reorientation.

Isn't that good. A way to see life unfolding...It happens individually and it happens in community and with communities. We are oriented, we know who we are and what we are about and we have an idea of where we are headed. But then something happens to throw us off course.

I've met with several people this week, some in the hospital, some here in my office, some as they were getting ready to make some significant decisions. Dealing with everything from constant pain, to lost jobs, to no food or shelter, disappointment upon disappointment.

What Brueggeman would call disorientation. In the book of Exodus it sounds like this, "the whole congregation complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

Do you hear the lament...the disorientation?

In the Psalms you can hear it again and again, in Psalm 79, the Psalmist writes, "How long O Lord? Will you be angry forever?"

Times of disorientation will come...we will lament and complain. Things will simply be upended, turned upside down. Do you know anybody who kind of lives in that place all the time? The place of Lament and Complaint, disorientation all the time? They cannot get through it, they do not know how.

But the Psalmists say it doesn't stop there with disorientation, the cycle is not complete. There is a time for reorientation.

Arvada
United Methodist Church

In the reorientation phase of life we are ready to give thanks for what we have and what God has provided for us both as a community and as individuals, we might give thanks for this church, or give thanks for the leadership that exists, or we try to renew our relationship with God. It is not a naïve thing... you have been through the tough times but now you are ready to get on with it. You have reoriented yourself to what is.

I think communion is one of the acts that helps us to reorient ourselves in light of the things that go on week to week, month to month. Some of you have told me that in your church while growing up before taking communion you needed to ask for forgiveness for your sins. You would symbolically get rid of them and then you would be ready for communion...a new start.

Communion, the symbolic act of communion, is part of reorienting ourselves. You may do what you did when you were growing up, confess your sins and find forgiveness from God, you may choose to think about it in a different way, perhaps by believing that communion connects you to the community and to Jesus, where before you felt like you were out there on your own. Maybe it reminds you of how the basic things in life like bread and juice are so simple and that they nourish us and let us live.

Communion can be our soul food.

He said, "I am the bread of life. And they said, "Give us this bread always...it is life to the world."